



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

****SCHOOL BREAKFAST OP ED****

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School breakfast week reminds us of the nutrition connection

State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster

The annual observance of National School Breakfast Week is March 8-12 this year and provides an opportunity for all of us to reflect on the important connection between adequate nutrition and academic achievement.

Quite simply, hungry bodies don't learn nearly as well as those that are nutritionally satisfied. Studies have shown that children who eat breakfast have fewer days that they are absent from school, they have overall higher scores on standardized tests, and they display improvement in math, reading, and vocabulary over students who had no breakfast. These studies also report that children who eat breakfast have a longer attention span and are more able to cope with the behavioral and social demands of the classroom.

While Wisconsin doesn't require that public schools offer breakfast to their students, the state has taken steps to stimulate growth in school breakfast program participation. In 1993, the state had 450 sites serving breakfast. That number has climbed to 1,210 sites at the end of last school year, and thanks to federal breakfast start-up grants brought to Wisconsin by Sen. Herb Kohl, another 62 sites have or will start serving breakfast this school year.

Wisconsin's average daily participation in school breakfast was 66,411 students for 2002-03, which is quite a bit lower than our school lunch participation rate of 525,519 students daily. However, average daily participation for school breakfast increased nearly 8 percent from the previous year, and there are indications that growth in the program will continue this year.

Over the past few months, the Department of Public Instruction has taken some steps to further support growth in school breakfast programs. We have targeted federal breakfast grant money to schools

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serving our highest need populations and worked with existing breakfast sites to increase student participation.

This year's national theme for School Breakfast Week is "Navigate Your Day with School Breakfast." While navigating the many challenges that are inevitable with new programs is difficult, I encourage school administrators and board members to consider carefully that school breakfast programs are an investment in children's learning and contribute to our goal to close the achievement gap. School breakfast is an investment that will pay dividends for children far, far into the future.

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Elizabeth Burmaster is the elected state superintendent of public instruction.